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ABSTRACT

Teachers in an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program at a Language Center in a Polish university were surveyed about the impact the ESL instruction they received had on their own teaching methods in other subjects. Results indicate that the communicative approach was attractive to teachers of all subjects. Twenty percent of all language teachers interviewed said they were adapting and using most of the techniques they experienced in the ESL language program, especially warm-up activities, that were entirely new to them. Other techniques which language teachers found attractive included directed writing with limited time and a limited number of words, and testing techniques such as cloze tests. They tried to incorporate authentic materials and video techniques in their teaching. Sixty percent of the teachers surveyed, mostly science teachers, were applying group and pair work activities, argument and discussion techniques, and problem-solving tasks. Fifteen percent of the teachers were medical faculty and were primarily attracted by different testing techniques. The remaining 5%, basically arts and humanities teachers, concentrated on writing techniques. One psychology professor decided to open special group therapy residential courses combined with foreign language instruction, using the communicative approach. Several students of the Language Center decided to change their subjects of professional interest and become English teachers as a result of participating in the ESL program. (MSE)

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How the methods of teaching EFL may influence teaching other subjects.

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Introduction

The paper attempts to describe a certain interesting phenomenon observed in the Language Center for Academic Staff at the Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland consisting in the fact that the students of the Language Center, who are academic teachers themselves, have been adapting and using the techniques and methods of teaching English as a foreign language /EFL/ in their own subjects.

Interviews made with the students of the Language Center, who are academic teachers employed at the Jagiellonian University, Technical College, Academy of Agriculture, Academy of Economics, Medical Academy and Academy of Arts, have shown that all of them have changed both their methods of teaching and their attitudes towards their students under the influence of their own learning experience gained in the Language Center.

It may seem natural that language teachers are liable to all new methods and techniques used in foreign language teaching; it is fascinating, however, that teachers of subjects that are in no way related to foreign language teaching also transmit methods used in teaching EFL into their own subjects and adapt them to their own needs.

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The Language Center for Academic Staff at the Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland.

In order to describe and emphasize adequately the influence of teaching methods used in the Language Center for Academic Staff in Cracow, Poland let us first discuss the teaching situation in the Language Center in relation to the general approach to teaching in Poland. The essence of teaching EFL in the Language Center concentrates in ten-day residential courses where the students have a chance of a full immersion into English mainly through a strong emphasis put on communicative approach, extensive listening, teaching through drama, language games, etc. Communicative teaching, however, with its insistence on ideas, has neither led to a neglect of the systematic teaching of grammar nor has the communicative bias been restricting such forms of linguistic expression as description, exposition and argument.

The daily routine of the residential courses includes plenary sessions, follow-up classes and evening activities, which results in the fact that the students talk English all day long, socialize in English and express all their communicative needs in English.

The educational system in Poland is still mainly teacher oriented, that is the students listen and make notes of whatever the teacher tells them is important. Therefore, the students of the Language Center in Cracow, probably for the first time in their learning experience, are exposed to the philosophy that mastering a foreign language need not be torture and drudgery.

In private interviews with PhDs of basically all faculties of Cracow colleges I found out that in almost all Polish

schools there is an immense authority gap between the teacher and the student consisting in the fact that it is the teacher who has the power and authority and the students are to listen and to learn if only for the sole reason of passing the exam. Perhaps this system is effective as far as accumulation of knowledge is concerned but it does not teach individual thinking, it does not awaken individual initiative in formulating new solutions, it does not help in humanistic perception of the surrounding reality, or group cooperation, group work, realized in the fact that you can learn from your fellow-student. And finally it does not open the students to new challenges such as functioning in a new reality, different from theirs. The students may be taught grammatical rules and a number of lexical items necessary to communicate their prospective communicative needs but the restricted classroom reality and conventional teaching is just not able to provide effective, culturally situated, real English communication.

The students of the Language Center claim that the attitudes they are exposed to in the Language Center, effective in teaching foreign language skills, have "opened their eyes" to the fact that the partner teacher-student relationship enormously increases the ultimate effect of teaching. They all admit that even though the strongest motivation of a university student is a mark in class, still, it is easier to learn things which are presented in a pleasant, interesting and challenging way.

Thus it seems that the education in the Language Center results not only in foreign language learning but also in helping the students to develop both their student and

teacher awareness - something they have probably never thought about being preoccupied with pursuing their own professional careers.

The students of the Language Center need quite a good command of English to satisfy all their needs: they use English in their scientific work both to read and publish papers as well as to communicate with other scientists all over the world. Since the ability to communicate their thoughts and knowledge in English, an international language, is the only way for them to gain an access to the information market, they come to learn English at the Language Center very highly motivated. Moreover, the fact that they are teachers themselves makes them additionally open to all teaching ideas. Thus, they are very cooperative and interested in the success of the courses on one hand; on the other hand, however, due to the fact that they all have some teaching experience they are subconsciously critical of all teaching methods used in the Language Center. It should be stressed that all the students of the Language Center have studied English for some time in the past. So, having been students in the past and having been teachers at present makes them exceptionally sensitive and demanding as far as all teaching methods are concerned.

Research Methods

Interviews made with the students of the Language Center were based on the following questions:

1. What subject/subjects do you teach?
2. Have you ever used any of the techniques or methods of teaching EFL that you witnessed in the Language Center in your own teaching?
3. If your answer to Question 2 is YES - give examples of the ideas used in teaching English in the Language Center that you applied to your own teaching.
4. Describe methods or techniques that could be applied to your subject most convincingly and explain how they influenced your own way of teaching.

The questions were asked to all the students of the last year who prepared to take the Cambridge Proficiency Examination and who had been the longest with the Language Center, and also to some students of "younger years" who had been very enthusiastic about the courses and thus willing to share their experience.

60 students were interviewed altogether. 20 per cent of them were language teachers, 60 per cent were science teachers, 15 per cent were medical teachers, and 5 per cent included teachers of humanistic subjects such as arts, law, etc.

Results

The interviews clearly indicated that the whole communicative approach was most attractive to teachers of all subjects.

?0 per cent of the respondents, language teachers, admitted that they were adapting and using almost all the techniques that they experienced in the Language Center with a special emphasis put on warm-up activities. The idea of warm-ups was entirely new to them not only as an exercise in itself but as a relaxing activity, at the same time introducing and mobilizing the students to a new effort. The psychological aspect of the idea of warm-ups, consisting in the fact that foreign language learning could not rely entirely upon the acquisition of certain language skills, but that it also should be an emotional, psychological experience was new and revealing to them.

Other techniques language teachers seemed to be particularly attracted to were directed writing with limited time and limited number of words as well as testing techniques used in the Language Center such as cloze tests with empty spaces to be filled in, grammatical transformations or dialogues to be completed with proper phrases. They tried to incorporate authentic materials and video techniques in their teaching, although they had many problems with preparing materials and buying necessary equipment in Poland.

60 per cent of the respondents, mostly science teachers, were applying group and pair work activities, argument and discussion techniques as well as problem solving tasks.

for instance, academic teachers working in the Department of Computer Science found methods involving group work and debate techniques particularly useful in their work with students. They asked their students to work in small groups on some fragmentary sections of a more general problem introduced earlier. When group discussions were completed, each group was supposed to choose a speaker to introduce the results of their work to the whole class. The discussion followed where the class tried to challenge the results and solutions suggested by a given group and the members of the group tried to defend their point of view. An obvious advantage of such a technique was that all the students were active all the time.

15 per cent of the interviewed were medical teachers who were mainly attracted by different testing techniques.

The remaining 5 per cent, teachers of arts and humanistic subjects, basically concentrated on writing techniques. Academic teachers in the Departments of Psychology, Science of Theatrical Matters and Preservation of Works of Art used directed writing in poetics classes /for instance, when students were asked to write poems built up from fragments of different pieces of writing/, they also used techniques of "rose words" and "word-webs" to review new items at the end of the lesson as well as other testing techniques introduced by Mario Rinvolucri and widely used by the teachers of the Language Center.

I would like to quote a very interesting case of one of the Faculty of Psychology teachers who decided to open special group therapy residential courses which would be modelled after residential courses organized

by the Language Center. On such courses students would be exposed to group therapy combined with teaching foreign languages. The methods to be used on such courses would be based on communicative approach, would include many warm-up activities and ideas taken from Dramatic Monologues for Listening Comprehension by Colin Mortimer /CUP, 1980/ where students try to negotiate solutions in group discussions. In the result, group psychotherapy courses of this type would be realized alongside with group learning of foreign languages.

Another example worth mentioning are several English students of the Language Center who decided to change their subjects of professional interest and become English teachers although, previously, they had taught different subjects. Naturally, they all used and copied the techniques and methods used in the Language Center.

Only two of the whole group of respondents interviewed /both of them psychology teachers/ claimed that they had never tried to apply or adapt teaching methods used in the Language Center in their own teaching. However, even they admitted that they had been trying to introduce a more relaxing atmosphere in their classes and that this was the result of their participation in the English courses organized by the Language Center.

Conclusions

All the students of the Language Center have changed their way of teaching towards a more communicative approach under the influence of teaching methods that they experienced in the Language Center. Already in their first years in the Language Center many of them try to use some of EFL techniques in their own subjects. Among the fourth year students there are only few who have never used such techniques or methods.

It seems to be a rule that the teachers who have started introducing new techniques in their classes first choose ideas at random but later many of them try to adopt a more systematic approach to their new ways of teaching. Some of them start building up systematic methodology that is based on the techniques and methods used in teaching English as a foreign language. This is especially common among teachers of German and French who prepare to publish course books for communicative teaching of German and French to Polish learners. Oriental, Spanish, Polish and Scandinavian languages are also scenes of many teaching experiments carried out by teachers of these languages who are or have been students of the Language Center. They all admit the importance of such factors as the introduction of authentic materials to teaching foreign languages, the introduction of new attractive ideas such as, for instance, different video techniques to all the subjects, the change from teacher-focused to student-focused teaching, which helps to build up a better motivation in students. Even those very few teachers who have never decided to introduce changes in their teaching methods that would result from

the experience connected with their participation in the courses organized by the Language Center, have changed their approach to teaching in general by introducing a more relaxing atmosphere in the class which, as they all admit, helps them in acknowledging the learning needs of their students better and which allows for a deeper intellectual contact with their students.

Thus the general conclusion seems to be that communicative methods and techniques used in teaching English as a foreign language are so attractive and effective that teachers of other subjects think it worth and possible to adapt them to their own teaching and, in the result, change their whole attitude to the teaching process.